

# WORLD LEARNING



Democracy Network Program  
in Romania  
1995-1999

A Summary

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# The Art and Science of Civic Engagement

*Among the laws that rule human societies there is one which seems to be more precise and clear than all others. If men are to remain civilized or to become so, the art of associating together must grow and improve. . . .*

Alexis de Toqueville

The above dictum concisely frames the philosophical underpinnings of the range of activities which have been delivered to Romanian civil society by World Learning under the Democracy Network (DemNet) Program. Designed by USAID to provide support to the growing nongovernmental, nonprofit sector in the free-market democracies appearing in Eastern Europe since 1989, DemNet in Romania has been able to respond to changing needs and emerging opportunities to promote and develop the “art of association.”

The primary intent of DemNet has been to support organizations that have policy concerns and to promote their prospects for sustainability. In doing so, DemNet has sought to contribute to the development of a democratic society in Romania. Robert Putnam notes the importance of pluralistic, networked civic engagement in his study of social capital in America, “Bowling Alone”:

The norms and networks of civic engagement . . . powerfully affect the performance of representative government. [They] foster sturdy norms of generalized reciprocity and encourage the emergence of social trust. At the same time, networks of civic engagement embody past success at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration. Finally, dense networks of interaction probably broaden the participants’ sense of self, developing the “I” into the “we,” or (in the language of rational-choice theorists) enhancing the participants’ “taste” for collective benefits.

In exercising its mandate to achieve the DemNet aims, World Learning has successfully been able to introduce concepts of civic engagement in a society where they had been exceedingly rare. A “cultural template” has been created for future policy engagement and collective problem-solving. It has been defined and led by individuals who have organized themselves according to their own priorities and who have undertaken action to address those priorities, thereby demonstrating the essence of a democratic society. These Romanian models have been developed with both formal and informal civil society organizations in diverse environments throughout the country and within a framework which promotes organizational sustainability, for the “art of association” is lost without the “science” of organizational development.

These, then, the art and science of association, have been the essential characteristics of World Learning's DemNet activities in Romania throughout the evolution of the project. The "art" has been addressed through the promotion of collective civic action and the promulgation of techniques for civic engagement towards the achievement of policy-oriented objectives. The "science" has been addressed in the promotion of an awareness of the importance of organizational development and in building a capacity for civic engagement over the long term.

Mark Parkison  
Project Director

## World Learning and Civil Society

The explosion of democratic activities and the rapid growth of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) observed for over a decade in transitional nations have provided new and important vehicles for public participation in decisions that affect individuals, families, communities, and countries. Formal and informal organizations of civic-minded individuals such as environmental stewards, human rights workers, women's advocates, laborers, and others are, in increasing numbers, moving their societies forward and influencing public policy at local and national levels. Yet their record of success is still mixed.

Though NGOs have, to various degrees, asserted their right to participate on all levels of policy making, with their inclusion comes the expectation that they will play effective, proactive roles in representing their constituencies. To meet this heightened expectation, NGOs find that they must develop and refine skills such as institutional development, management and accounting, community organizing, watchdog techniques, advocacy, conflict resolution, communications, fundraising, and networking.

To address these needs, World Learning brings its expertise in building the capacities of individuals and institutions, fostering sectoral stability and growth, and nurturing the development of civic coalitions and networks. Founded in 1932 as The Experiment in International Living, World Learning now comprises Projects in International Development and Training (PIDT), its global development division, and the School for International Training, an accredited institution of higher education. PIDT, operating from Washington, DC, has extensive expertise in managing democracy and governance activities in strife-torn nations and emerging democracies.

World Learning's programs in civil society have included an exceptionally wide range of activities: providing technical assistance (targeted consultancy) and training; developing and designing assessments, programs, and evaluations; managing programs that provide grants to NGOs; developing advocacy and public policy curricula; promoting cross-sectoral dialogue and linkages; conducting conferences, workshops, and seminars; and offering its decades of institutional capacity-building expertise, judgment, and experience to local NGOs in such diverse places as Russia, Angola, Malawi, and Egypt. This report is a summary of World Learning's civil society activities in the Democracy Network Program in Romania, 1995-1999.

# Key Elements of Civil Society Engagement

## 1. The External Factors

The creation and viability of a healthy, engaged nonprofit sector is dependent upon key factors of the external environment:

1. Legal and constitutional guarantees for the freedom of association, including a legitimate legal framework under which nonprofit organizations can be founded;
2. NGO access to relevant levels of political and economic authorities and decision-makers; and
3. Adequate economic resources that can be directed to support nonprofit activities.

Fortunately, a legal structure for NGOs was already in place prior to Romania's "revolution," as nine years later, the nation has made little progress with respect to this first external factor. The 1924 Romanian Law on Foundations and Associations (Law 21/1924), though in some respects lacking provisions which would strengthen the sector, has nonetheless provided a legal structure for the formation of associations and foundations and the growth of the nongovernmental sector. As of June 1999 there were approximately 20,000 legally constituted nongovernmental foundations and associations in Romania, representing an increase of over 60 percent in only four years. (Twelve thousand five hundred were reported in 1995.)

Despite this large number, the majority of these institutions represent small associations and foundations led by individuals whose strong personalities (as opposed to strong missions) determine the agenda for the organizations, if any agenda exists at all. The majority of these NGOs are inactive, lacking ongoing services, projects, and programs. Clearly, however, the number of registered NGOs alone indicates that the right of association has been actively exercised in Romania.

The other two key external factors are more problematic. Romanian NGOs still have limited access to public authorities responsible for formulating public policy. Although groups have engaged local agencies such as public utilities, political and economic decision-making remains the purview of the central government in Bucharest — to the point where paving a street is an item in the national budget. Clearly, this structure has limited the possibilities for direct participation on the part of small, locally oriented groups. NGO efforts are further impeded by a political process that releases elected officials from direct accountability to their constituents. Romanians vote for political parties, not individuals. As a result, officials with unpopular performance records face very few direct consequences from the public. Romanian NGOs, for example, cannot influence individual officials by organizing public support for a more responsive candidate, as is done in the United States. Until recently, NGO influence in the policy arena had rarely been the result of organizational legitimacy, credibility, or

power, but rather stemmed from networks of personal contacts by individual members.

Finally, Romania's moribund economy has meant a shortage of financial resources — private as well as public — which might otherwise be used in support of services or activities undertaken by the nonprofit sector. Macroeconomic reform capable of generating significant economic growth was anticipated after the elections of December 1996 but has yet to occur. However, the limited availability of local financial resources cannot be said to be reflective of the value society attaches to nonprofit activities in Romania; it is simply reflective of the environment in which NGOs operate, a reality which will remain until economic reforms are instituted.

Positive change is occurring. Significantly, the Sponsorship Law of 1998 provides tax advantages to persons and institutions that support Romanian nonprofit organizations. Increasingly, Romanian NGOs are attempting to obtain local funding, however limited it may be. Also, in the last year there has been visible progress towards the devolution of power to local officials, and for the first time local organizations will have access to decision-making authorities at the local level.

## **2. The Internal Factors**

In addition to the external elements addressed above, several key internal factors are relevant to the ability of NGOs to participate effectively in the political life of a community:

1. NGOs must possess organizational capacities that contribute to institutional legitimacy, credibility, authority, power, and sustainability.
2. NGOs must have staff skilled in advocacy techniques.
3. NGOs must recognize their responsibility to engage public authority on behalf of constituencies they serve.

World Learning's activities in the Democracy Network Program in Romania directly addressed these internal factors as a way to develop and expand the ability of Romanian civil society to participate in political and economic decision-making. The following pages report DemNet's activities in addressing these internal factors and highlight the program's results through June 1999.

# Building Capacity for Public Participation

## Goal

The NGO community serves as a primary vehicle for citizen participation in forming, implementing, and monitoring public policy

## Purpose

NGOs will have moved towards sustainability through adoption and application of effective managerial, organizational, and advocacy practices

### 1. An Operational Overview

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) awarded the Romania Democracy Network Program to World Learning in May 1995. In Romania and 10 other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, USAID's DemNet programs sought "to develop and strengthen a broad range of indigenous public policy-oriented NGOs." This goal was to be accomplished through a program of training, technical assistance, and grants provided to NGOs active in USAID's four priority sectors for the region: environment, social safety nets (social services), economic restructuring (development), and democracy/human rights. Moreover, the DemNet implementers in each country were obligated to assure that "the local NGOs thus assisted should have the capability of sustaining themselves once USG funding has ceased." Though NGO sustainability in Romania is hindered by the external environmental factors mentioned above, World Learning and its partners facilitated the engagement of Romanian civil society in political and economic decision making and enhanced the prospects of the NGOs served for achieving financial, operational, and programmatic sustainability.

Under DemNet, World Learning led an implementing partnership which included Support Centers of America (SCA), a U.S.-based nonprofit organization that provides training on organizational issues, and the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a nonprofit, nongovernmental organization that promotes democracy worldwide. Active during the first year of project implementation, SCA managed an extensive assessment of Romanian civil society and delivered Romanian-specific training modules in project planning, proposal writing, and project management. NDI's participation in the project was longer and included providing NGOs with training and technical assistance in external relations, with emphasis on constituency development and advocacy. NDI also provided several *pro bono* trainers and advisors who, in cooperation with NDI's field representative and other project staff, delivered training and technical assistance in advocacy, volunteer management, and community organizing. Other support came from the two regional DemNet grantees, Freedom House (formerly the National Forum Foundation) and the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law.

World Learning, through its project office in Bucharest, managed all components of the project (training, technical assistance, and grants), guided the activities of its partners, and provided the overall vision, direction, and approach to DemNet in Romania.

Initially, World Learning and its DemNet partners focused on NGOs working in the four USAID priority areas. A team planning meeting held in June 1995 helped to clarify how Word Learning's vision, as described in its project proposal, could best be implemented in Romania. One of the outcomes of this team



meeting was the development of a project framework, which clarified the project’s goals, purposes, targets, and activities. With these objectives in mind, an operational plan was laid out for delivering training, technical assistance, and grants to formally established Romanian NGOs with policy concerns. The first challenge, however, was to locate those groups and to better define their needs.

## 2. Needs Assessment and Baseline Survey

With 12,500 non-governmental organizations registered under the Romanian Law on Foundations and Associations by July 1995, the challenge of reaching the targeted audience appeared daunting. How would DemNet reach its target audience? Which of those NGOs were active? Which were active in USAID’s priority sectors? Which were active in the priority sectors *and* addressed public policy?

The task was made somewhat simpler by the reality of the context. Active, legitimate NGOs were a minority of those officially registered. The priority sectors of USAID further limited the scope. Also, organizations such as gardening clubs, sports associations, and cultural foundations fell outside the project mandate and greatly reduced the potential pool of recipients of DemNet services and support. To find the pool, World Learning and its team conducted the first – and, to date, the only – extensive field study of Romanian associative life.



For the purposes of the survey, the assessment teams divided the country into four regions. In fieldwork conducted in these four regions between late July 1995 and early February 1996, the DemNet team interviewed over 350 Romanian NGOs, representing by and large the extent of active, legitimate organizations in the USAID priority sectors. Additionally, approximately 50 local government entities were surveyed in order to obtain a better understanding of the relationship between NGOs and public authority and to obtain leads on active organizations. The

Activities
Training Technical Assistance Grants
Target
Registered Romanian NGOs with public policy concerns

purpose of these surveys was to identify Romanian NGOs with the potential to influence public policy and to make a preliminary assessment of their training and technical assessment needs. The surveys also provided the opportunity to look at the environment in which NGOs operate and the degree to which there was an opportunity and willingness for NGOs to collaborate with one another.

To obtain eligibility for DemNet services, NGOs were screened for:

- a mission that allowed the organization to influence the development and implementation of public policies in any of the four USAID priority sectors;
- basic governance and management structure with an evident commitment for a stronger, more democratic organization;
- a willingness to collaborate with other NGOs, government entities, and/or private enterprises on activities of mutual benefit that relate to the organizational mission;
- an inclusive membership and democratic leadership dedicated to the organizational mission;
- a record of programmatic or organizational achievements in service delivery; and
- the absence of any affiliation with a political party.

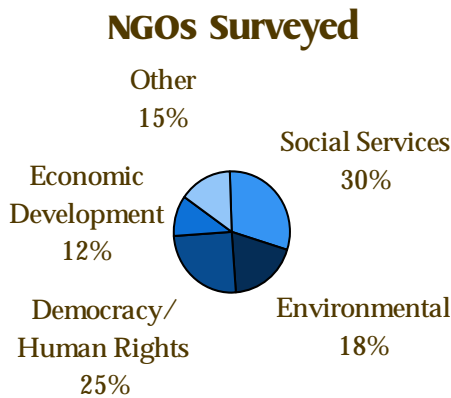


Chart 1.

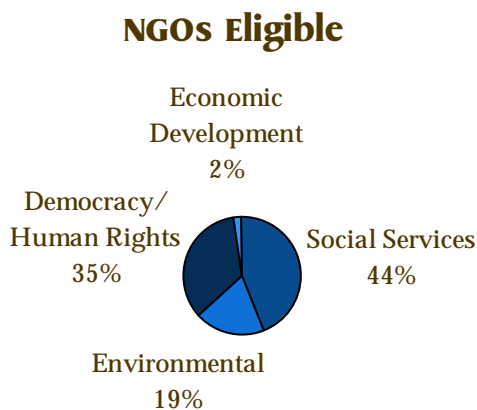


Chart 2.

These eligibility criteria can be grouped into three areas. The first is advocacy — an organization had to be interested in adopting or expanding a policy-advocacy role on behalf of its constituents. The second area is an organization's level of institutional development. World Learning looked for evidence that an NGO could effectively develop and sustain its policy concerns. Finally, an NGO had to demonstrate a willingness to collaborate with state, market, and other third sector entities. This collaborative approach (as opposed to a competitive or confrontational approach) is critical to an NGO's ability to effectively engage public authorities and to contribute constructively to the creation of a democratic, market-oriented society. In short, World Learning sought to find civil society organizations that could, if provided the assistance of DemNet services, develop the internal elements that ensure strong, pluralistic participation in political and economic decision making.

### Survey Findings and Recommendations

World Learning sent teams of staff and local consultants to the four corners of Romania to seek out eligible organizations to which DemNet services could be delivered. Nearly 400 NGOs were surveyed between July 1995 and June 1996. (See Chart 1.) The survey identified 134 NGOs that qualified to benefit from the menu of DemNet services. (See Chart 2.) Outreach to Romanian civil society continued throughout the duration of DemNet, and additional NGOs obtained qualification through individual intake assessments using the same interview model. By June 30, 1999, 359 organizations had been identified as eligible for formal DemNet support. The teams returned to Bucharest with lists of qualified NGOs as well as findings that directly informed the implementation of the project. Some of these findings follow.

**Advocacy.** Civil society organizations, in order to effectively participate in the public arena, require an understanding of and skills in policy advocacy. While organizations in all regions cited individual success stories based on personal relationships, it was clear that most NGOs surveyed did not understand the importance of policy advocacy or their role as advocates, nor how they might undertake that role for their constituents in the political domain.

The surveys made clear that to effectively support policy-oriented NGOs, there was a fundamental need to get Romanian NGOs to recognize that they had policy concerns in the first place. The finding that relatively few organizations in Romania understood advocacy or their responsibility to undertake it underpinned the development of the DemNet training modules in advocacy. The survey teams also learned that advocacy training, to be most effective, should be supplemented with technical assistance to individual organizations. The surveys yielded other recommendations pertaining to project activities such as examining the role of volunteers in advocacy, providing training and technical assistance in organizational marketing, and developing and distributing case studies on public policy advocacy to be used as models for replication.

**NGO Management.** World Learning defines NGO sustainability in terms of organizational development. That is, sustainable organizations are well developed programmatically, operationally, and financially. Therefore, in order to contribute to the sustainability of Romanian NGOs, an understanding of the organizational needs of each of these NGOs informed World Learning's approach. Institutional development is related not only to sustainability, but also to the efficacy of policy-oriented activity. A well-developed NGO is inherently more credible and more powerful than a less developed organization. Therefore, an accurate assessment of the internal strengths and weaknesses of NGOs was important in defining the training and technical assistance activities World Learning would implement under DemNet.

**Collaboration.** In order to have constructive participation by civil society in public policy decision-making, it is necessary for the range of stakeholders to communicate with each other and to find ways of collaborating to achieve the greater good for the community. This need is especially great in a society such as Romania where the totalitarian regime had engendered enormous levels of suspicion and distrust and where the change of government in 1989 did not represent an absolute break with the former regime. The surveys therefore tried to assess the degree to which Romanian NGOs cooperated with the public and market sectors in achieving positive, effective dialogue. To assess NGOs, World Learning relied on its Institutional Analysis Instrument. (See pages 10-11.)

The surveys indicated that although there had been instances of successful collaboration, it occurred most often within the NGO community and almost exclusively among organizations working in the same sector. Collaboration with public authorities was most often happenstance and rarely considered. In many cases, the lack of collaboration between NGOs and the government resulted from

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"The greatest results for our organizational capacity training are that we're much better known and we have more people involved."

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— Emma Farnas President,  
Asociata Handicapator Fizici

# Institutional Analysis Instrument

The Romanian intake assessment surveys were based on an abridged form of a tool developed by World Learning called the Institutional Analysis Instrument (IAI). This tool (which was also used later by DemNet in its complete form with organizations that received grants) measures the organizational development of an NGO in six aspects of organizational life: Governance, Operations and Management Systems, Human Resources, Financial Resources, Service Delivery and External Relations.

## 1. GOVERNANCE

### Examines

Board of Directors or Other  
Governing Body  
Mission  
Legal Status  
Constituency  
Leadership

### Findings

Most Romanian NGOs surveyed lacked understanding of the roles and responsibilities of governance structure, especially differences between a board of directors and executive staff. (Law 21/1924 does not require a division of organizational governance for associations or foundations; nor would such a requirement automatically lead to *good* governance.)

## 2. OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

### Examines

Management of Information  
Administration  
Planning  
Communications  
Program Development and  
Management

### Findings

Management structures were generally weak, with minimal attention paid to formalizing internal systems on which to build organizational structure. Most organizations had little or no separation of duties and lacked means of internal control, such as operations manuals.

## 3. HUMAN RESOURCES

### Examines

Staff Roles  
Task Management  
Performance Management  
Staff Development  
Salary Administration  
Team Development  
Conflict Resolution

### Findings

The surveys revealed a general confusion in defining the different roles of staff, members, and volunteers. For example, many organizations tended to identify beneficiaries as “members.” Further, NGOs rarely involved members, volunteers, or other stakeholders in program planning or implementation. Most NGOs made little effort to develop new leaders, and most also lacked systems to manage and utilize their volunteers.

#### **4. FINANCIAL RESOURCES**

Examines	Findings
Accounting	In general, Romanian NGOs lacked information on potential sources of funding or methodologies for accessing those sources. Many did not appreciate the need to cultivate donors and did not recognize that their experience with donor-driven funding should not be regarded as the norm. Many also were unaware of the options available for increasing income, especially in terms of utilizing fee-for-service activities. Most organizations had neither annual budgets nor fundraising plans. Fundraising was generally thought to provide for projects and activities and not for core support of the organization. Further, NGOs generally ignored the Romanian government's requirements for financial reporting.
Budgeting	
Financial Controls	
Audit/External Financial Review	
Resource Base	

#### **5. SERVICE DELIVERY**

Examines	Findings
Sectoral Expertise	The surveys indicated that many NGOs had strong technical skills and good service delivery approaches, yet many changed their missions to suit donor interests, or lacked missions altogether, making it difficult to explain their scope of services easily.
Community Ownership	
Impact Assessment	

#### **6. EXTERNAL RELATIONS & ADVOCACY**

Examines	Findings
Government Collaboration	Most NGOs throughout the country had weak marketing skills. Few, for example, had developed basic marketing materials. Others had good media skills with local media, but not with national media.
NGO Collaboration	
Policy Advocacy	
Mobilization of Resources	

These findings resulted in an acute understanding of the training and technical assistance needs of the Romanian NGO community, and thus DemNet delivered a series of seminars in institutional development and advocacy. World Learning developed training modules in strategic management, organizational communications, fundraising and financial management. World Learning tailored the IAI specifically to Romanian organizations, translated it, and provided it to NGOs at no charge, allowing them to assess their institutional development priorities and to track their progress in meeting those priorities.

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The Ministry of Education, which represented the advocacy target for this project, recognized Academia Catavencu as a credible partner in the activities contained in the educational reform. The effort undertaken by the NGO (to develop an educational methodology for media criticism appropriate to Romanian high school students and to promote its inclusion in the curriculum) was successful and the textbook and course designed by them was adopted.

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Academia Catavencu

the absence of resources or the lack of a legal basis for public authority to consult or contract with NGOs. The lowest levels of collaboration occurred between NGOs and the private sector; NGOs cited the lack of a legal framework, such as tax incentives, as a key obstacle to collaboration.

### Summary of Findings

Many characteristics of Romanian NGOs were typical of developing NGO sectors.

- Technical (service delivery) skills are stronger than management skills.
- Collaboration, among themselves and especially with public authorities, is rarely undertaken.
- There is little understanding of advocacy and how to approach it.

Also, the Romanian context exacerbated some of the weaknesses found in the NGO sector.

- The experience of the Communist period, particularly venal, discouraged working together, violated interpersonal trust, and corrupted concepts of voluntarism.
- The weak economic climate and the absence of macroeconomic reforms make financial sustainability difficult.

## 3. Delivering DemNet Services

DemNet services were delivered in three phases. The phases evolved as a result of improved understanding of the needs of the Romanian NGO community, changes in the implementation approach sought by USAID, and an opportunity to expand the reach of the activity beyond formally established NGOs and into areas of Romania with limited experience with civil society.

### Phase 1

Phase 1 consisted of a broad approach to providing services to eligible organizations as laid out in the initial proposal and project work plan. Training consisted of SCA modules in project planning, proposal writing, and project management adapted to the Romanian context and delivered to less sophisticated, less developed organizations. This training helped organizations with limited experience in obtaining donor funding to acquire the knowledge and skills that would better enable them to access DemNet grant funds. Technical assistance during this phase consisted of extensive consultations in proposal writing and project planning with organizations that were submitting concept papers and proposals to the DemNet grants program. Additional technical assistance helped interested groups meet the eligibility criteria for DemNet assistance, which also contributed to organizational development.

The grants program began during this phase with World Learning's development of the grant guidelines. DemNet grant guidelines were reviewed and approved not only by USAID, but also by the Democracy Commission, composed of staff from the U.S. Embassy and the United States Information Service. Approval of the guidelines came in February 1996, at which time the grants program was



announced and World Learning began to receive concept papers and proposals from NGOs.

Recognizing that Romanian NGOs had a very limited understanding of policy advocacy, World Learning and its partners designed a curriculum to promote among all qualified NGOs a basic understanding of public policy and the role of NGOs in the formation and influence of policy.

During Phase 1, an average of 42 organizations responded to invitations to attend each of these training modules delivered in each of the project's four regions. Eighty-three NGOs attended the jointly developed introductory advocacy training, also delivered regionally. Fifty-five NGOs submitted concept papers for review, seven of which were developed into project proposals strong enough to submit for USAID and Democracy Commission review in May 1996. In September 1996 these seven proposals were approved and the projects launched.

### Lessons Learned – Phase 1

1. Conducting an extensive field study was crucial to understanding the needs of Romanian civil society organizations and their prospects for successful participation in the policy arena.
2. NGOs that lacked clearly defined missions had difficulty defining their policy issues – and more difficulty acting on them.
3. It must not be assumed that NGOs are naturally concerned with policy matters. Romanian NGOs did not seem to be interested in policy, saw it to be too much work, had too little experience in public policy, or had high expectations of failure in this new arena.
4. At first, most Romanian NGOs did not understand advocacy adequately enough to be able to express a link between the projects they were proposing for DemNet grants and the ability of their organization to engage in the policy arena.

In August 1996 USAID began to reorient projects to fit their evolving country strategy, and World Learning worked with USAID to readapt DemNet. A revised approach would directly address the internal elements necessary to move Romanian NGOs closer to assuming their responsibilities to actively participate in political and economic decision making.

### Phase 2

It was clear from the experience of the first year of activity that Romanian NGOs had little practical experience in the policy arena and, more importantly, were not disposed to adopting or acting on priority policy concerns. Essentially, Romanian organizations lacked defined policy concerns. This fact posed a substantial obstacle for World Learning to effectively deliver on its DemNet mandate.

## Outcomes: Phase 1

- Produced the first substantial analysis of Romania's NGO sector
- Introduced 83 organizations to the concept of policy advocacy
- Brought the neologism "advocacy" into the Romanian language
- Awarded 7 grants to Romanian NGOs working to:
  - ◆ improve organizational management capacities
  - ◆ prevent constitutional abuses
  - ◆ expand information on entrepreneurship
  - ◆ improve relations with local authorities
  - ◆ enhance external relations

## Outcomes: Phase 2

- Fifty-five organizations outlined the first comprehensive policy advocacy campaigns in Romanian history.
- Awarded 6 grants and provided technical assistance, which resulted in:
  - ◆ Improved organizational management capacities, especially in external relations
  - ◆ Higher profile organizational marketing activity
  - ◆ Novel fundraising efforts
  - ◆ Heightened public awareness of organizational priority issues
  - ◆ A cadre of Romanian NGO professionals experienced in the management of policy advocacy campaigns
  - ◆ Expanded relationships with public authorities and recognition of organizational credibility and legitimacy
  - ◆ A reformed national secondary school curriculum
  - ◆ Draft legislation for energy reform
  - ◆ Heightened water quality standards
  - ◆ Stronger environmental regulations

In response, World Learning and USAID altered the DemNet approach to focus on NGOs whose missions were compatible with the newly developed set of USAID strategic objectives for Romania.<sup>1</sup> A review of those NGOs to determine which had a minimal capacity to undertake policy-oriented activity helped to narrow the field.

Targeted NGOs were assigned to one of three groups: 1) *national* organizations whose missions directly related to USAID/Romania Strategic Objectives (SOs); 2) *local* organizations whose missions related to these SOs; and 3) national and local organizations whose missions did not relate directly to the SOs but which would support the SO through policy-oriented activity. (This last grouping identified organizations that would otherwise be omitted from consideration, such as those addressing the needs of women and children, or those working in the health sector.)

During this second phase, World Learning gave the selected organizations a thorough understanding of advocacy. The first goal was to create examples of public participation by Romanian civil society organizations and thereby to establish models for replication by other NGOs. Phase 2 activity also sought to promote organizational development, especially in external relations — an aspect of institutional life that is especially relevant to success in the policy arena.

World Learning provided technical assistance to the targeted organizations to assist them in defining their priority policy concerns. This led to a nine-day training in policy advocacy project design, which was delivered by World Learning with considerable assistance from NDI and an AVID (American Volunteers for International Development) volunteer. Technical assistance was provided to help the organizations frame an advocacy campaign in a concept paper. After a review of the concept papers, successful NGOs were invited to receive technical assistance in proposal writing, tailored to their own proposed campaigns. Draft proposals submitted to DemNet were thoroughly reviewed by its staff, the best of which were nominated to USAID for a final decision by the Democracy Commission. NGOs receiving grants received further technical assistance in advocacy, external relations, and financial management from World Learning and its NDI and AVID partners.

Phase 2 reached 89 Romanian NGOs through their participation in a policy advocacy project design and proposal development workshop. Fifty-five of these organizations fleshed out policy advocacy campaigns to address their priority policy concerns (36 as proposals, 19 as concept papers). Fourteen of these projects were reviewed and nominated to USAID for funding before USAID suspended the grants process in order to review its approach to civil society support in light of the continuing external challenges faced by civil society in Romania. Nonetheless, the Democracy Commission approved six of the projects before the process was halted. These represented the first instances of a planned, organized approach to policy advocacy ever attempted by Romanian civil society.

<sup>1</sup> USAID's strategic objectives in Romania called for "increased, better informed public participation in political and economic decision making."



## Lessons Learned – Phase 2

1. Engaging in advocacy and public participation helps NGOs appreciate the value and impact of those activities.
2. Directed and linked training, technical assistance, and grants energizes policy-oriented groups to actively undertake their policy agendas.
3. A targeted approach to civil society support can create synergies and crosscutting results, which benefit USAID, local NGOs, and the NGO climate.

## Phase 3

With the suspension of the grants program and USAID's internal review of its support to civil society underway during the spring and summer of 1997, World Learning proposed an approach that would forego the grants component while continuing the project's focus on developing the internal elements critical to pluralistic participation. Training and technical assistance in organizational development issues continued to emphasize the definition and expression of priority policy issues and the sustainable participation of NGOs in public life. Grants would be limited to NGO activities identified by USAID.

Changes to the DemNet approach enabled staff trained in community organization to be placed in the field. These individuals were charged with developing the capacity of loosely formed community organizations in poor, rural areas to define and address their priority issues in collaboration with public authorities. This aspect of DemNet was developed not only to continue support for public participation by civil society but also to develop the capacity of community organizations to respond to the Romanian Social Development Fund (RSDF) opportunities.

The RSDF is a World Bank loan designed to support the needs of poor communities. Operating as a grants program, the RSDF provides financial assistance for infrastructure repair, microenterprise investment, and social service activities. The RSDF required trained community facilitators to help communities identify their key needs and to organize themselves to work together and, where possible, with their local authorities to implement small projects that would help to reduce poverty in their community. These objectives complemented the DemNet mandate to support public participation in political and economic decision making.

World Learning sought to pilot a community facilitation program and proposed to train and place six community organizers who, in turn, would identify and train local community leaders. These community leaders, with technical assistance from World Learning, would collaborate with public authorities to identify and prioritize local needs. The community, NGOs, and public authorities together would then design a project to address those needs and submit a proposal to the RSDF for funding.

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"As a result of the training and technical assistance, as well as the grant, we spent more time for strategic planning (the process is not perfect right now but it's significantly improved), and we changed the way we looked at certain problems such as fundraising at the local level. We had a fundraising event at our 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary where we raised 5,000,000 lei from sponsorships and donations. Also, as a result of the fundraising training, we started to plan a local fundraising campaign."

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— Vasile Moisa, grant project coordinator, Albamont

## Outcomes: Phase 3

- Profession of Community Organizer created and established in Romania
- Fifteen new civil society organizations created in regions and communities where none previously existed
- Collaborative approaches to community problem solving introduced
- New approaches to fundraising adopted by 25 organizations as a result of training and technical assistance
- 4 grants awarded to Romanian NGOs contributing directly to:
  - ◆ improved organizational management capacities
  - ◆ expanded public information on lead pollution
  - ◆ greater public awareness of ways to reduce lead poisoning in children
  - ◆ enhanced NGO relations with local authorities and businesses
  - ◆ prospects for the sustainability of a critical information source for civil society

After lengthy discussions with USAID, implementation of this activity started in October 1997. The project evolved along two tracks. The first provided training and technical assistance to NGOs in organizational capacity development and sustainability, as well as a limited grants program. The second track provided technical assistance to poor, rural communities to promote the development of civil society and to enhance their capacity to define priority local concerns and advocate for the resolution of those concerns in collaboration with public authorities.

Phase 3 training addressed both of these tracks. World Learning designed and implemented a training series that addressed critical sustainability competencies: strategic management, financial management, organizational communications, and fundraising. This training series was delivered to over 100 organizations in four regions of the country; 22 of those organizations were NGO resource centers that had been established with grants from the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society, a local NGO set up by EC/PHARE. By training resource center staff, World Learning expanded NGO access to information that will help sustain Romanian civil society.

With the support of NDI, World Learning also trained Romania's first community facilitators. Eighteen people were trained originally, six of whom went on to work with 15 communities in the development of 13 pilot project examples for the RSDF.

In Phase 3, NGOs continued to request and receive substantial technical assistance in organizational development as well as in fundraising and marketing. A series of six manuals on aspects of organizational management, advocacy, and community facilitation provided indirect technical assistance to 800 recipients.

With the support of the AVID volunteers, considerable technical and administrative assistance was also provided to an NGO coalition that successfully advocated for the adoption of a Sponsorship Law, which established tax incentives for market sector support of the nonprofit sector. This legislation is recognized by the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law as a leading piece of NGO law in Eastern Europe.

In addition, the DemNet grants program, though considerably reoriented, remained viable. For example, CENTRAS, a leading Romanian NGO dedicated to the support and development of the Romanian third sector, was given a grant to support their magazine, InfoONG. Through InfoONG, World Learning reached out to more than 2,000 civil society organizations and public authorities with information about the internal elements of effective public participation by groups with policy concerns: organizational capacity development, advocacy and collaboration.

Two cities, Baia-Mare and Oradea, were targeted at the request of USAID for projects combining both the NGO and community development facets of World

Learning's activities. World Learning brought together local authorities and representatives from local civil society and the market sector. These groups then worked out the terms of collaborative activities that would address a priority community concern. These concepts were worked into project proposals, three of which were funded by DemNet, with the approval of USAID/Romania. From project development to expected results, public participation was strong. Phase 3 continued to define DemNet activities and services to June 30, 1999.

### Lessons Learned – Phase 3

1. Fostering community leadership is critical to the development of viable, collaborative projects that address priority community needs.
2. The facilitation process is useful in creating collaborative solutions to community problems in both rural and urban areas.
3. A new community dynamic is established when, after learning to work together to address community priorities, other community issues are addressed. These are the collateral benefits from the collaborative experience.
4. The community facilitation process creates an opening for the establishment of civil society organizations where none existed previously.

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“After the fundraising training, we had a direct mail campaign, which we had not done before. We raised 20,000,000 lei though this method alone. We also had a charity event where we raised around 4-5 million lei. I think the training helped us organize the event professionally.”

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— Maria Volintiru, Executive Director, Pentru Fiecare Copil o Familie

## DemNet Service Summaries

### 1. Training

DemNet training benefited NGOs receiving grant support from the project as well as a broader audience of potential civil society actors. Over the life of the project, World Learning delivered approximately 3,200 days of training through 12 training programs and three seminars. Two of the training sessions (policy advocacy project design and proposal development) included planned technical assistance interventions. A total of 300 NGOs from all regions of Romania participated in some or all of these training programs (see sidebar). Sixty of these groups attended seven or more of the training programs. One-third of the NGOs receiving training are based in Bucharest; the remaining NGOs are located in 35 cities throughout Romania, with nine cities bearing the highest concentration.

The type of training offered and the number of NGOs attending is a direct result of critical needs identified in the NGO community during the initial countrywide assessment. For example, World Learning trained over 40 NGOs in project planning and proposal writing. Also, World Learning placed significant focus on helping NGOs understand advocacy and its role in their overall activities. Approximately 100 NGOs participated in one or both of the advocacy programs offered.

Further, the noticeable difficulty NGOs experienced in developing effective policy advocacy projects in Phase 1 led to specific training in the design and development of advocacy proposals. Advocacy became the target for much of the support to the 89 NGOs during the second phase of grants described above.

Both during the baseline survey and throughout the project, the needs of NGOs in improving the effectiveness of their internal operations remained in view. Training programs addressed various aspects of management, from strategic planning to external communications.

Because of Romania's weak economy, special emphasis was placed on financial management of NGOs, from how to effectively manage and report the use of financial resources to how to develop and implement more effective fundraising programs within a floundering economy.

DemNet training has resulted in an increased awareness of the importance of organizational sustainability issues, enhanced organizational management capacity, and increased levels of organizational development. Participating organizations have also increased their understanding of advocacy and have applied these skills successfully, especially through several of the DemNet-supported activities. DemNet training

Training Topic	Number of NGOs Attending
1. Project Planning	44
2. Proposal Writing	34
3. Introduction to Advocacy	81
4. Advanced Advocacy	83
5. Collaboration	48
6. Project Management	50
7. Marketing	113
8. Managing Volunteers	79
9. Policy Advocacy Project Design	89
10. Policy Advocacy Project Proposal Development	87
11. Financial Management	133
12. Lobbying	30
13. Strategy Development	106
14. Organizational Communications and External Relations	105
15. Fundraising	104

also helped NGOs to better appreciate the value of collaboration with others and to develop partnering skills. As a result, a number of organizations established collaborative relationships with state, market, and other civil society institutions, including the media, where none previously existed.

## 2. Technical Assistance

World Learning delivered both formal and informal technical assistance through DemNet. Formal technical assistance (TA) to NGOs included advising in the six key categories of an organization's management: governance, operations and management systems, human resources, financial resources, service delivery, and external relations, as well as in specific subcategories such as advocacy, lobbying, and fundraising. (See sidebar.)

The details of this support most often came as a result of the IAI, described above. In fact, as part of the TA activities, more than 60 NGOs have benefited from an in-depth analysis using the IAI, and World Learning and its partners have conducted approximately 270 TA interventions for over 125 organizations, totaling 1,500 hours of TA in the six key areas of management.

Additionally, informal TA has been delivered through assistance provided by telephone. During the Phase 2 emphasis on proposal writing, for example, DemNet staff responded to 20-30 calls per week. In addition, throughout the project approximately 10 calls per week requested assistance on reporting procedures and financial management. Eight subject areas were the source of over seventy-five percent of the TA interventions; financial management and project management received the most focus.

TA Objective	Number of Interventions
■ Financial management	47
■ Project development, planning, management	36
■ Proposal development	28
■ Fundraising	25
■ Advocacy	24
■ Human resource management	17
■ Marketing	14
■ External relations	14

## 3. Grants

The DemNet grants program has been characterized by three distinct phases, which have been described above. Over the life of the project, World Learning awarded 17 grants with a total value of over \$370,000. Nearly half of the grants were for activities in the environmental sector (seven); the others were split among the sectors of economic restructuring, democracy/human rights, and social services. (See page 20.)

All DemNet grants served not only the stated purpose of the project but also contributed to organizational development indicators. World Learning consultants, trained in the use of World Learning's Institutional Analysis Instrument, conducted day-long assessments with grantees to develop a set of institutional development recommendations in the six facets of organizational life. These recommendations were then included in the grant framework as grantee objectives.

Grant Summary Chart			
Organization (Location)	Sector	Purpose	Amount (USD)
TER – Tineretul Ecologist din Romania (Busteni)	Environment	To establish an ecological information center in Busteni	11,500.
APM – Asociatia Patronilor si Meseriasilor (Cluj)	Economic Restructuring	To promote supportive policies for free enterprise in Cluj	7,882.
CDIMM – Centrul pentru Dezvoltarea Intreprinderilor Mici si Mijlocil (Arges)	Economic Restructuring	To promote external relations and institutional development	6,790.
ASIC – Asociatia Societatilor cu Capital Privat din Industria Carnii (Bucharest)	Economic Restructuring	To promote external relations and institutional development	1,998.
PIATRA ALTARULIU (Cluj)	Environment	To publish an environmental education book on the importance of karstic areas	8,700.
APADOR – Asociatia pentru Apararea Drepturilor Omului in Romania (Bucharest)	Democracy/ Human Rights	To provide operational support for human rights programs	37,618.
FOA – Fundatia Oamenilor de Afaceri (Constanta)	Economic Restructuring	To promote institutional development and government relations	9,435.
GESS – Grupul de Explorari Subacvatice si Speologice (Bucharest)	Environment	To increase the severity of penalties for non-compliance with the Water Protection Act	37,050.
APER – Asociatia pentru Politic Energetice din Romania (Bucharest)	Environment	To advocate the passage of an energy-efficiency law.	35,530.
SAR – Societatea Academica Romana (Bucharest)	Democracy/ Human Rights	To advocate the inclusion of civic education in the national secondary school curriculum	32,890.
ARAS – Asociatia Romana Anti Sida (Constanta)	Social Services	To improve levels of public responsibility for AIDS patients and their families	25,840.
ALBAMONT (Alba Iulia)	Environment	To advocate environmental standards in the Alba Iulia water supply watershed	27,426.
ACADEMIA CATAVENCU (Bucharest)	Democracy/ Human Rights	To advocate for the inclusion of media criticism in the national secondary school curriculum	25,955.
ECO-CARPATICA (Baia- Mare)	Environment	To develop public awareness of the effects of atmospheric lead pollution	35,020.
ASSOC – Asociatia Profesionala de Asistenta Sociala (Baia-Mare)	Social Services	To develop approaches for the abatement of lead poisoning	15,787.
Societatea de istorie naturala NYMPHAEA (Oradea)	Environment	To advocate the enforcement of regulations on solid waste disposal	17,200.
CENTRAS (Bucharest)	Democracy/ Human Rights	To provide interim operational support for a magazine serving the information needs of Romanian civil society	34,000.
<b>TOTAL</b>			<b>370,621.</b>



## 4. Support Resources for Civil Society

To augment its direct services aimed at developing the internal environmental factors critical to CSO participation in the policy arena, World Learning made available to Romanian NGOs an array of resources for use beyond the term of the DemNet Program. World Learning worked with 22 local NGO resource centers, providing them with trained staff to respond to the needs of the nonprofit community in the regions each serves. In addition, World Learning's Institutional Analysis Instrument, translated into Romanian, and distributed as a guide for moving an institutional development agenda forward, was provided to 30 NGO professionals drawn from the breadth of Romania's NGO community. World Learning also worked with a cadre of six Romanian process trainers who joined DemNet staff in refining their abilities to provide training services in each of the DemNet training modules mentioned above.

Further, a series of eight manuals relating to organizational management and advocacy were created to address the internal competencies necessary for an engaged, sustainable Romanian civil society. All the manuals were specific to the Romanian context and have been published in both Romanian and English (see sidebar). They were distributed to over 800 NGOs and NGO resource and support groups, and can be found on the DemNet site on the World Wide Web (<http://www.worldlearning-romania.org>). There, together with information on community facilitation and links to further sources in English, they constitute the largest resource on these issues available in the Romanian language, freely available to an ever-increasing number of "wired" Romanian NGOs.

Finally, DemNet provided critical support in fostering the availability of financial resources to the Romanian nonprofit community in the future. The Non-Profit Sponsorship Law, providing tax incentives for a transfer of financial resources from individuals and business, was drafted by a CENTRAS working group with support from the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law. Technical assistance from World Learning helped CENTRAS to form a coalition from the broad range of Romanian NGOs in an effort to move the legislation forward. With administrative support from World Learning and technical guidance from DemNet's AVID partners, the coalition successfully moved the legislation into force. At such time when the Romanian economy becomes unfettered from undue state control and surplus financial resources are generated, the Romanian community of nonprofit organizations is well positioned to benefit.

## 5. Community Facilitation and Development

As described above, USAID and DemNet collaborated with the RSDF effort in developing a pilot program to train individuals to be community development facilitators and to work in several communities to test the facilitation process. The final objective was to test the validity of the community facilitation concept and to leave the pilot communities with project ideas and proposals that could be submitted to the RSDF once it became operational. Three counties (Alba,

### NGO Management series

- Financial Management and Compliance Manual for Romanian Non-Governmental Organizations
- Getting Your Message Out: A Guide to Strategic Communications
- Fundraising: A Guide for Romanian Non-Governmental Organizations
- Advocacy: Skills and Tactics (Developed by DemNet partner NDI)
- IAI: A User's Guide to Institutional Assessment
- Strategic Development
- Policy Advocacy Project Design and Proposal Writing (Developed jointly by World Learning and NDI)
- Community Facilitation

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Many articles on GESS activities have been published nationwide in newspapers, and three documentaries about water conservation were produced and distributed in a partnership with Romanian television. With some of the equipment purchased as part of the grant, a digital image bank is now available and can be used for income generating purposes.

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– Grupul de Explorari Subacvatice si Speologice

Botosani, and Tulcea) were selected for the pilot program. Eighteen people, about half of which were women, were selected to participate in the community facilitation training developed by World Learning. DemNet had resources to select and place 6 facilitators from this group. From their initial 8- to 12-month facilitation efforts, 13 communities within the three counties were assisted in developing local improvement projects. Eleven of the projects involved the rehabilitation of a local unpaved road; one project consisted of the rehabilitation of a small-scale piped water system; and the final project was a community-based social service project.

USAID, the World Bank, and the communities judged the pilot effort a success. As a model, its impact has already been felt. Two additional groups of facilitators have been trained by the RSDF using the World Learning community development facilitation training framework. In addition, one of the NGOs already active in the DemNet, Albamont, invited World Learning facilitators to conduct training in community development facilitation. Albamont had received support from the EC/PHARE program to conduct a community development activity in six to twelve communities from Alba county. As of April 1999, two of the trained facilitators were working in their villages to help organize activities. The importance and novelty of World Learning's efforts is reflected in the national exposure received in December 1998 in a brief segment during the evening news.

The activity has demonstrated that local facilitators are an engine of civil society development. All organized community groups are required to register themselves as formal organizations prior to applying for an RSDF grant; this de facto accomplishes the expansion of civil society.

In addition, over half of the community groups formed with the support of World Learning's technical assistance have been registered according to Romanian Law 21/1924 as community-based organizations, a more sophisticated level of organizational development than an informal community group.

The impact of World Learning's community facilitation efforts is seen in the fact that, even without the external funding, citizens continue to organize to achieve positive change in their communities. In several places, villagers have made infrastructure improvements, frequently with the collaboration of local authorities. For example, in June 1998, nineteen villagers in Valea Larga (Alba county) initiated a rehabilitation activity of a portion of a local road. A drainage ditch was cleaned and the holes in the road were covered with ballast. In Visterna, in the county of Tulcea, villagers formed a committee to solve a problem of garbage, which had been thrown without regard, infesting the water and air and leaving an unsightly mess all around the village. The problem was quickly resolved, and the same committee has continued to ensure that the newly achieved cleanliness in the village is maintained. In this same village, the young people renovated a community center after obtaining the approval of the local authorities for the renovation and use of the center.



Local authorities also have shown support for community improvement efforts. In Alba, the county council (Consiliul Countyean Alba) has already provided significant financial support to RSDF projects developed by two communities, Ponor (US \$41,700) and Salciua (US \$25,000). Based on several discussions between concerned citizens and local authorities in Burliest, a small village in the county of Botasani, several improvements were initiated. A small 10-passenger bus began to make three trips per day to Botosani Town. Wiring was installed for a new telephone system in the village. The school library was made operational. In fostering collaborative approaches to problem solving at the community level, World Learning has been able to expand the reach of a Romanian civil society that is expressing and acting on its policy concerns and is engaged in political and economic decision making.

## Impact

### Advocacy

- Introduced concept of advocacy to Romania
- Developed local expertise in advocacy
- Presented first training programs on advocacy in Romania
- Initiated an “advocacy vocabulary” adopted by other agencies in Romania
- Funded first advocacy campaigns for a number of organizations
- Advocacy now practiced by relatively large number of NGOs

### Organizational Development

- First to talk about programmatic sustainability in correlation with financial and operational sustainability (previously discussion related only to financial considerations)
- Introduced concept of external relations — not just public relations — emphasizing relationships with the media, government, and beneficiaries
- Funded first external relations positions in a number of organizations
- Strengthened NGO understanding of organizational development through use of the IAI
- Strengthened NGO knowledge base and practices relating to all aspects of financial management
- Developed first comprehensive manuals in Romania (and in Romanian) on critical organizational development topics

### collaboration

- First with a coherent and practical approach on community development through collaborative engagement
- Trained and placed first community facilitators in Romania
- First collaborative community projects aimed at addressing priority community concerns resulting from facilitation approach

## Closing Words – The Legacy

World Learning's DemNet Program in Romania has had a significant and positive impact on the internal factors that lead civil society organizations to assume their public political roles and responsibilities. Through training in organizational management and institutional development, Romanian NGOs are now better able to guide and monitor their own development needs. Through training in advocacy, they are better able to define their relationship to policy and political life. Through technical assistance in designing and implementing a policy-oriented advocacy campaign, they are now able to act on their defined priorities on behalf of their constituents. By providing Romanian NGO staffs with skills in organizational development and in advocacy, they have the resources to inform their own growth in political participation. Through technical assistance in community-based collaborative problem solving, NGOs are able to move their agendas forward. With financial support, they can develop successful programs and models for others in the future. Over 300 NGOs have directly benefited from DemNet services, representing a substantial response to the initial DemNet mandate.

Advocacy, as a method to foster needed change in Romania, is now understood and in practice. NGOs are also better able to communicate with the public and to demonstrate the value of their activities in their communities. Even within a weak economic environment, several NGOs have conducted successful fundraising campaigns through special events and other means of raising locally generated funds. Moreover, there is a cadre of trained individuals within the NGO community capable of providing technical assistance and training to current and new NGOs that wish to become more effective elements of civil society.

USAID and World Learning were out in front finding ways of demonstrating the benefits of collaboration among government and the third sector. For example, the community development facilitation effort, which provided critical inputs for the development of the Romanian Social Development Fund, also introduced to Romania new techniques for the development of civil society and the promotion of collaboration between citizens and their local authorities.

In light of the continued difficulties facing Romanian NGOs — both internal and external — DemNet's impact has been considerable. General economic and social hardships within the country have been a significant factor throughout the life of the project. Under the continuing weak economic climate, it is unlikely that a significant number of NGOs can be supported by local businesses and the general population in the foreseeable future. However, DemNet yielded enough success stories to prove that the concepts and ideas are valid even in a society as troubled as Romania.

The successful adoption and utilization of new concepts introduced through DemNet was greater in NGOs that had an initial base capacity and a willingness

to try something new. As is known — but too often forgotten — sustainable results are not reached quickly, although a few quick successes may keep the momentum going. New concepts and capacity building require time to be understood and adopted. A consistent, sometimes intense level of support helps to consolidate and maintain progress.